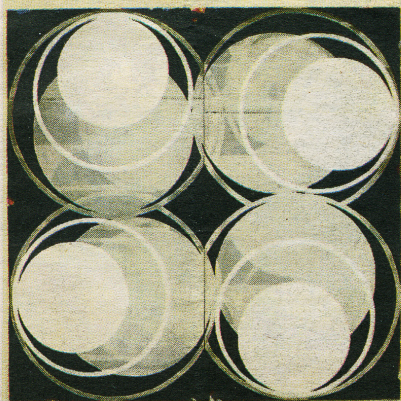


Small curios at large



The process of creation may have been witnessed when Peter Atkins was artist in residence, writes **JILL STOWELL**.

PETER Atkins is a bower-bird. But an obsession with small preloved curious objects may not be immediately obvious to people visiting a survey show of his big paintings at Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.

Covering much of his career, they feature apparently abstract emblems, arranged and repeated on large canvases. Yet these strange devices have their origins in real objects that have taken the fancy of the artist in junk shops, suburban streets and foreign airports.

Flying into Barcelona in 1998, he picked up from the floor of the arrivals hall the handle of a disposable paper cup, which earlier this year he worked up into a major painting. The asymmetric form of the handle, layered, overlapped and veiled creates a teasingly ambiguous image.

Buttons, buckles, notoriously a toe separator; all reappear, strangely changed, on a giant scale in paintings that are equally about paint.

In the new acquisitions at NRAG is a smaller composite work, showing carefully arranged collections of families of finds, interesting in their own right, but offering low-life raw material for the creation of high art images. Stencils are increasingly used, appearing and disappearing into veils of whiteness. We often have a sense of hidden depths, of a painting's active prehistory.

Another favourite starting point has been the appropriation of patterns from fabrics, remnants and op-shop plates and glasses. Dedicated recycling



REPEATS: Works by Peter Atkins, above left, *Glass* and above, *Toe Separator*. The abstract emblems and strange devices have their origins in real objects that have taken Atkins' fancy in junk shops, suburban streets and foreign airports.

extends to using disposal tarpaulins, patched and stitched, rather than brand new canvas.

Many people will have observed the process of creation while Peter Atkins was artist in residence at the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery in the summer of 2001-2002.

Now resident in Melbourne, he was revisiting the Hunter area where he was born in 1963 and where he studied from 1983-84.